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Joseph Kraft

The Blame Falls On Casey

The Central Intelligence Agency is going into the public pillory again. But this time nobody can blame those favorite whipping boys—the liberals of the 1970s.

This time the blame falls squarely on the CIA and its present director, William Casey. Under his tutelage, the agency has misled the White House and Congress, thus shattering the base of bipartisan support for intelligence activities.

The agency originally came into bad odor in the wake of Watergate and the Vietnam War. Investigation by a Senate committee headed by the late Frank Church of Idaho showed that the CIA had a hand in all kinds of dirty operations, including attempted assassinations.

In that period, those who tried to defend the agency as a valuable national resource could at least argue that the temper of the times was sour. Unfortunately, Jimmy Carter made one of his worst appointments in naming Adm. Stansfield Turner to be director of Central Intelligence. Turner very early began a feud, which he is still indulging in, with the "old boy" network of CIA veterans.

But there were figures in Congress, particularly among defense-minded Democrats, who saw the need to rebuild. They worked behind the scenes to make more money available to the agency and to restore morale. A good example is Sen. Daniel Moynihan, the New York Democrat, who has been serving as vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

"When I came in," Moynihan recalled recently, "I asked myself whether we shouldn't scrap the CIA and start over again. The officers who came up here looked so damaged.

They couldn't think on their feet. They couldn't play checkers, let alone chess. They were good people who had been hurt. But of course we couldn't close it down. So we tried healing. We gave them money and told them they were first rate. And there were signs of progress."

The progress halted with the appointment of Casey as director in 1981, and the onset of covert operations in Nicaragua. Casey would have been an embarrassment to any bureau of government. Before becoming director, he was mixed up in charges of plagiarism and was hip deep in Watergate. At the agency, he was involved in smelly stock transactions, dubious testimony on the Carter briefing book and association with shabby characters. A former Republican secretary of state, trying to defend Casey, could only say, "He's not as sleazy as he looks."

As to Nicaragua, the right-wing dictatorship of the Somozas was ousted in 1979. The successor regime, democratic at first, quickly yielded to a group called the Sandinistas, with ties to Cuba and the Soviet Union and a background in Marxism-Leninism. The United States undertook to harass the Sandinistas by supporting against them a guerrilla force known as the *contras*.

"From the first it didn't feel right," Moynihan said of the CIA operation against the Sandinistas. "You knew you were dealing with one part of the agency, not the whole. Somewhere in that place were a group of people like an outfit in a Le Carré novel. They were looking for somebody to give them a job again. Some of their briefings about their plans came close to fantasizing. Then they began to hide things."

One operation hidden from the Senate committee was the mining of Nicaraguan harbors. When events disclosed the fact, Barry Goldwater, the committee chairman, fired off an angry message to Casey. Moynihan tried unsuccessfully to find out what had happened. Then, on April 12, 1984, President Reagan's national security adviser, Robert McFarlane, told a conference at Annapolis that "every important detail" of the mining had been "shared in full" with the congressional committee.

As a protest against being called a liar in public, Moynihan resigned as vice chairman. Casey, prodded by the White House, made a public apology to the committee. Moynihan claims that McFarlane told him that in reporting to the White House, the CIA had been "either disingenuous or outright wrong." A second case of "hiding" now surfaces with the manual written by a contract employee of the CIA which advised the *contras* to "neutralize," or assassinate, Sandinista officials. The Senate committee was not told of that manual, which sanctioned terrorism and violated a presidential order. In the foreign policy debate, President Reagan said the manual had been heavily excised both by the CIA in the field and at headquarters. He claimed only a handful of the original manuals was distributed.

That turns out to be a cock-and-bull story. There was little editing, and hundreds of manuals were distributed. But what the president said was what the CIA had told the White House.

Obviously something is very wrong. Congressional support for the agency is now almost nil. Moynihan says of Casey and the agency, "It breaks my heart. We need an intelligence capacity. But they're hurting themselves and they don't know it. They still don't understand they are damaging the president, not helping him."